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SUBJECT: TURKISH MEDIA REACTION
MONDAY, AUGUST 17, 2009

In Today's Papers

Holbrooke to Ask for More Troops for Afghanistan (Hurriyet)
Mainstream Hurriyet carries a front page story which reports the U.S. Special Envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke is expected to ask Turkey to send combat troops to Afghanistan during an upcoming visit to Turkey. Hurriyet reports "Several U.S. diplomats have confirmed the troop demand," but, "Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu has denied it."

Ocalan's 'Road Map' Leaks

All papers: Mainstreams Sabah and Vatan report that jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan's "road map" for a solution to the Kurdish issue was leaked over the weekend. The "road map" was scheduled to be announced in the Southeastern city of Erzurum on Saturday, August 15th - the 25th anniversary of the PKK's rebellion - however at the last minute the announcement was postponed. Vatan reports that, according to sources from the government and the Democratic Society Party, Abdullah Ocalan's "road map for a solution" is comprised of six parts, the improvement of Ocalan's prison conditions at Imrali, a democratic constitution, the recognition of Kurdish political rights, negotiations with the PKK, the abolishment of village guard system and the application of general amnesty for PKK who lay down their arms and return from the mountains." Ocalan also reportedly spoke through his lawyers, saying that the solution plan should include "the recognition of the Turkish state by Kurds in Turkey and the state should accept the right of Kurds to become a democratic nation."

PKK Ringleader Karayilan Interviewed with Le Monde

Mainstream Sabah reports that while Turkey debates the government's Kurdish opening, PKK leader Murat Karayilan told Le Monde that "Turkey should apologize for the mistreatment of the Kurds," and then Turkey "should adopt Europe's democratic standards in order to resolve the Kurdish issue."

Atalay Meets Families of Soldiers Martyred by the PKK

Papers report Interior Minister Besir Atalay met with the families of martyred soldiers in fighting with the PKK to discuss the ruling AKP government's Kurdish initiative. Mainstream Vatan says family members said Turkey did not have a "Kurdish issue" but a "PKK terrorism issue," and the families blamed the government for "engaging in partnership" with the "killers of their sons." Atalay

told the press after meeting families from 12 provinces of Turkey, "We have taken note of their expectations and sensitivities. We respect them."

Editorials on Kurdish initiative

Mehmet Barlas wrote in mainstream Sabah: "The fact of the matter is the Kurdish initiative is the name of a searching process for finding ways toward democracy and peace. At this point even PM Erdogan does not know what exactly it includes. On the other hand, given the harsh stance from the opposition, one wonders what could have happened if there were a concrete proposal put forward?"

Mehmet Yilmaz wrote in mainstream Hurriyet: "The government does not look well prepared about the initiative but it is still a good thing to see efforts in this nature. The PKK is the main factor to sabotage the Kurdish initiative as it moves forward. In order to prevent such sabotaging attempts, the government should focus on a comprehensive democratization package and work with main opposition CHP at the parliament. Advancing democracy will be the right approach to address the problem and it will marginalize the PKK."

Semih Idiz wrote in mainstream Milliyet: "Along with the Kurdish initiative, PM Erdogan's recent meeting with religious minority leaders has been another important development. Erdogan talked about the government's "struggle for democracy" during this meeting.

If it is not a common rhetoric for populism, democracy struggle requires full tolerance and upgrading standards of human rights and freedoms in their most advanced forms. It remains to be seen whether the PM will act on this nature or it will remain another

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populist approach."

Yasin Oktay wrote in Islamist oriented Yeni Safak: "The government took a risky path but it is certainly worth the effort. This is a process and will expand Turkey's horizon in the end. It will also completely reverse the ongoing 'citizens are for the state' mentality."

Erdogan Meets Minority Representatives

Sunday papers report that in an effort to expand the scope of his government's "democratic opening" regarding the Kurdish question, Prime Minister Erdogan met with the representatives of minority groups in Turkey, including the Greek Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew I and Rabbi Ishak Haleva. Addressing the representatives, Erdogan said his government will never get involved in regional, ethnic and religious chauvinism, reports Islamist-oriented Zaman. Erdogan underlined some mistakes were made in the past, and added that his government was working to handle them. Erdogan said that in all parts of the country, the problems were not merely psychological and sociological, but military, political and diplomatic as well as economic ones. The PM said his government's investments in southeast Turkey totaled 13.5 billion lira. Erdogan acknowledged there were problems in implementation, but added that the democratic initiative launched by the government would change many things. Mainstream Hurriyet said the discussions focused on the problems of minority foundations. According to liberal Radikal, the minorities' clerics did not put forth any demands during the meeting.

Ahmadinejad's 'Women's Initiative'

Media note Iranian President Ahmadinejad's appointment of three women to his new cabinet as "an opening" or "an initiative" toward women. Mainstream Hurriyet says, "Ahmedinejad announced in a live TV interview that this is the first time since the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979 that women will have seats in the cabinet." Ahmedinejad nominated Fatima Acurlu for the welfare and social security ministry and Merziye Vahid Destcerdi for the health ministry and added that at least one more woman will be nominated for the cabinet. Mainstream Posta headlines, "Reform in Iran." Mainstream Hurriyet comments that Ahmedinejad "launched the women's initiative in order to gain political support from women voters who played a positive role during the turmoil following the disputed election. Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak headlines, "Three Women Ministers in Iran," and hails the event as historic since, "This is the first time in the Islamic Republic's 30-year history that women

have entered the cabinet." Mainstream Haberturk headlines, "The Iranian Cabinet Is Opening Up to Women." Islamist-oriented Zaman headlines, "A Woman Minister Surprise in Iran," and the paper reports, "Conservative Iranian President Ahmadinejad has taken a surprise step by appointing three women to his cabinet," in "a first since the Islamic Revolution in 1979." Leftist nationalist Cumhuriyet reports, "Women will enter the cabinet for the first time since the Islamic Revolution." Mainstream Vatan reports, "An Initiative For Women Ministers in Iran." Mainstream Hurriyet headlines, "A First Since 1979."

In a related story, Mainstream Milliyet reports that on Sunday Iran put 28 more activists and opposition supporters on trial for their alleged involvement in the post election turmoil. French Academic Clotilde Reiss, who had been in jail since July 1, was released on bail. Reiss was teaching French at the Isfahan University in Tehran and was accused of taking an active role in the protests.

Dostum Returns to Kabul (Yeni Safak)

Media outlets report exiled General Abdul Rashid Dostum has returned to Afghanistan on the eve of the presidential elections in the country on August 20. Dostum is expected to be in the city of Sibirgan in northern Afghanistan today. In a rally to be held soon in the city, the ethnically Uzbek general is expected to rally support for President Karzai in the upcoming elections. Liberal Radikal says Dostum, who has won 12 percent of the votes in 2004 elections, could help Karzai win the first round of elections to be

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held on Thursday. Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak notes, "The U.S. Embassy in Kabul expressed 'deep concern' over the General's return," to Afghanistan after he has lived in exile in Turkey. Islamist-oriented Zaman reports in, "Dostum Is In Afghanistan Prior to Elections," that, "Dostum, the ethnically Uzbek Afghan General, has lived in exile in Turkey and made a surprising return to Afghanistan yesterday." Zaman also notes, "The U.S. Embassy in Kabul expressed concern over his return." Zaman says American press has reported President Obama ordered an investigation into Dostum for massacring hundreds of Taliban prisoners. Mainstream Vatan headlines, "The Banned General Dostum Returns to Afghanistan," as, "An important name in the alliance against the Taliban has returned to Afghanistan after a year-long exile," to "a crowd of supporters who were waiting to greet him." A column in mainstream Hurriyet notes, "Karzai is making alliances with notorious Afghan figures like General Dostum," and the column reminds, "The Obama administration has initiated an investigation into whether Dostum committed war crimes," against Taliban fighters in Afghanistan.

Tensions Prior to Afghan Elections

Media note Taliban threats against voters has worsened the already tense climate of fear in Afghanistan prior to the elections this week. Islamist oriented Zaman and mainstream Milliyet share the same headline, "The Taliban Threatens (Afghanistan's) Election Ballots." Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak says "The Taliban Threatens to Cut Off Voters' Fingers," and the paper reports that security considerations are threatening the reliability of the vote, adding that "Karzai leads the opinion polls with 44 percent support."

In a related article, leftist Taraf carries a front page story on how women's participation has increased in the Afghan political environment, "Even though women are still covered by their burkas, they are participating in rallies and expressing support for Karzai." On the inside pages, however, Taraf notes, "The Elections Face An Open Threat from The Taliban." Mainstream Hurriyet headlines, "Afghan Women's Stubbornness," and the paper notes, "Despite the threats against women, many are determined to vote," as "Afghan organizations are targeting the participation of 5 million women voters." In a related column, Hurriyet's Ferai Tinc harshly criticizes Afghan Leaders Karzai's attitude of "giving all possible concessions against women's rights in order to win the election," as, "The Karzai administration accepted demands from Shiite tribes for the sake of their electoral support and the government passed a law which fully violated women's rights and the role of women in society. Women's rights have turned into a trump card that Karzai used like a bribe."

TV News (CNN Turk)

Domestic

- MHP leader Devlet Bahceli criticized the AKP's Kurdish Initiative by warning PM Erdogan against "falling in the trap of separatists."
- Independent MP Kamer Genc says the Alevis should establish their own party.
- Turkey, the U.S. and Israel will launch Monday the "Reliable Mermaid" search and rescue exercises in the Eastern Mediterranean.
- Cumhuriyet editor Ilhan Selcuk is hospitalized over the weekend in intensive care unit after suffering a stroke.

World

- A radical Muslim sheikh's call for the creation of an Islamic emirate in Gaza has sparked clashes with Hamas forces that left 21 people dead and injured 121 others.

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- A huge car bomb explodes in the center of Kabul, killing seven people and wounding 91.
- At least six people were killed in two bomb attacks on a popular restaurant in Baghdad.
- Iran's ambassador to Syria Ahmad Mousavi says Syrian President Bashar al-Assad postponed his visit to Iran.

SILLIMAN